The boy in row nineteen has a cold.

“Don’t lean on my armrest,” he cautions his sister. “You’ll get germs. They’ll stuff you up, it will hurt to fly, and like last vacation we’ll all have to listen to you whining, ‘I can’t unplug my ears.’ The boy sits on the aisle and his sister, a little girl in braids, has the window, although—germs aside—she’s agreed to switch seats halfway through the flight, which means she gets to see the plane rise from Detroit, and he to see it land in Paris. He had not been thinking of death that morning when he came out of the woods and into the higher meadow, stopping to rest on a rough boulder. Out of the trees, the snow and the light were set to bake him, so he had stowed his parka and mittens in his pack and then stripped down to his shirtsleeves, wrapping his woolen sweater around his waist. Already two hours from home, he was making good time. He had kept the pack light. Two new wolf traps, some files and tools, a knife, a length of chain, cord, a bottle of whiskey.

Cash may still be king, but on the streets of Japan there's anew rival for the throne. Millions of people there use their mobile phones to buy everything from vending-machine sodas to train tickets. To pay, a user passes a chip-enabled handset over a compatible reader. Credit is then deducted from a stored-value account provided by NTT DoCoMo, Japan's dominant cell-phone carrier. Transactions take a fraction of a second to complete, pleasing customers and merchants alike. In addition, consumers can use their phones to buy products over the mobile Web, or download digital music. And losing your phone is not the same as losing your wallet, because the handset can be remotely disabled.

I had been enjoying the iPhone 3G. The out-of-the-box price was right — as low as $200, with a two-year contract — if you qualify for the subsidy from AT&T. It was slimmer and sleeker than its predecessor. It had real GPS. And, addressing my biggest problem with the original iPhone, data loaded much faster when a 3G network was available. Most of all, I was itching to try out loads of the intriguing applications from the iTunes App Store, about a dozen of which I'd already downloaded. But there's no joy in a juiceless phone.

Stately proportions and a bold wall-to-wall grille give the MKS some visual heft. When I rolled up to curbs in a brilliant black, all-wheel-drive model, careful not to scour the huge 20-inch chrome wheels, pedestrians often stopped to admire the car. When’s the last time you could say that about a Lincoln?

The positive impressions continue inside. The cabin’s design and controls make a clean, uncluttered presentation, accented by well-shaped strips of wood. The cabin also highlights Lincoln’s user-friendly technology. The touch-screen navigation system, with its large central display, offers solid mapping data and is refreshingly easy to use. The Bluetooth-based Sync system, developed jointly by Ford and Microsoft, ably manages phones and music players with voice commands.